

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH STEVE BOND, DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE TRANSITION TEAM, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ TIME: 10:09 A.M. EDT DATE: FRIDAY, AUGUST 1, 2008

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Hello. I'd like to welcome everyone to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Friday, August 1st. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg, and I'm with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be monitoring in our call today.

A note to our bloggers on the line: Please remember to clearly state your name and the blog or organization that you are with.

Today our guest is Mr. Steve Bond. He's the director of Intelligence Transition Team. He'll be talking about his team's experience with building and developing the Iraqi minister of Defense and minister of Interior intelligence capacity and capability. With that, sir, I'm going to turn it over to you. You can go ahead and start with the opening statement, and then we'll get the bloggers' questions.

MR. BOND: Okay. Over to me?

LT. CRAGG: Yes, sir, over to you.

MR. BOND: Okay. Well, hello, everyone. As the moderator said, I'm Steve Bond. I'm the director of the Intelligence Transition Team in the Multinational Security Transition Command Iraq, or MNSTC-I.

Serving in this capacity, I lead this team of advisers and the senior coalition intelligence adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior and counterterrorist command.

First, thanks for the opportunity talk to you today, and I think blogging is an important venue to get the word out about the development of the Iraqi security forces.

For this interview, what I'll do is, I'll provide an overview highlighting some of the progress and challenges we face in building the intelligence enabler for the Iraqi security forces.

Let me also say up front that I'm extremely honored, to be serving alongside the intelligence professionals in the Iraqi security forces and

especially with the men and women in the U.S. and coalition armed forces in Iraq.

Just a little about me and, I think, you have already got my bio. Or some of you have my bio. But I'm a retired colonel in the U.S. Army and have served in a variety of military intelligence positions, from the tactical to national levels.

I'm a graduate of the U.S. Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. And during my time in the military, I participated in a number of operations and campaigns which include Operations Just Cause in Panama in 1989; Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, 1990 to 1991 here in this part of the world; and Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti in 1994.

I retired from the Army in late 2004 and took a job with a major U.S. defense corporation and came back into government service early this year, to serve in this position. And I have been in Iraq since March of this year.

The organization I direct is the MNSTC-I Intelligence Transition Team. And MNSTC-I has the mission to assist the government of Iraq to develop, organize, train and equip and sustain the Iraqi security forces. The Iraqi security forces consist of the ministry of defense, ministry of interior and the counterterrorist organizations.

In concert with the MNSTC-I mission, the Intelligence Transition Team works side by side with and advises the intelligence organizations in the Iraqi security ministries including, in MOD, the directorate general for intelligence and security, also known as DGIS, which is something like the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency; also in MOD, the joint headquarters intelligence directorate, or JHQ M2, as in mike two, similar to the U.S. Joint Staff J-2; the intelligence academy, which provides basic and specialty intelligence training to intelligence professionals in the ministry of defense, ministry of interior and the counterterrorist command.

And over to the ministry of interior, I provide advisers to the national information and investigation agency, also known as NIIA, something like our U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, investigation and intelligence arm. In the counterterrorist command, we support the G2, similar to the U.S. Special Operations Command Intelligence Staff organizations.

I think all of you are close followers of the situation here in Iraq. And I'll just say that from my vantage point, the security situation in Iraq continues to improve every day.

During the past five months, we've seen the Iraqi security forces take the lead in significant operations in Basra, Sadr City, Baghdad, Mosul, Al Amarah and now just this week in Diyala.

The successes by the ISF in these operations are a result of investments made by the United States, the citizens of Iraq and the work of the coalition forces to improve the capacity, capability and professionalism of the Iraqi security forces.

But the work's not done. And I believe that it's important that we continue to develop the Iraqi security forces, in order to provide a safe and secure country, for the citizens of Iraq, and help achieve stability in this region of the world.

One of the key enablers to establish an effective security force is the intelligence enabler. Intelligence information is essential to defeating the insurgent terrorist threat and establishing Iraqi self-reliance in order to reduce the need for U.S. and coalition forces. With the Intelligence Transition Team's assistance, DGIS, the Joint Headquarters M2 and intelligence assets in the army, the air force, the Ministry of Interior and CTC have all improved their capabilities for conducting intelligence operations. And I've got just a few examples.

The Iraqi security forces learned the value of national-level intelligence supporting the recent operations. One initiative was for the national-level intelligence agencies to provide representatives to work together in interagency intelligence fusion cells. These fusion cells have supported the tactical commanders in the recent operations. In the past few months, we've seen an unprecedented level of cooperation among the agencies to support the tactical commanders at the regional operations command centers, providing strategic and operational intelligence, as well as targeting information to those commands. These cells are co-located with the regional ops command centers in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, al-Amarah and Diyala.

The capability to produce and action targets has significantly and, I'll say, exponentially improved in all the agencies over the last quarter, and that quarter goes from April to June, and in support of recent operations in Basra, Baghdad, Sadr City and Mosul. For example, the M2 alone -- the targeting increased nearly tenfold from the first quarter of this calendar year to the second quarter. While the M2 was the most improved, there was also a similar occurrence in both DGIS and NIIA in this part quarter.

I attribute this increase in a variety of things. Basically, it's the combined result of applying the processes learned at the intelligence academy, which is reinforced by our advisers; a willing exchange of information and actioning targets in the fusion cells and at the regional ops command centers; and just the fact that there are a lot of targets. The result, however, is the ISF has removed a significant amount of terrorists and criminals, over 1,200 from April through June, as a result of this focused targeting.

The DGIS Directorate for Imagery and Mapping reached its initial operating capability this year and is supporting the Iraqi security forces with specialty maps and imagery products for the operations conducted in the last few months. All these are high-quality and in Arabic. And the Directorate for Imagery and Mapping is a very fledgling NGA, National Geospatial Agency, type organization.

Over the past year the ISF intelligence organizations have been -- have grown and expanded in their capacity. I'll say that there was great progress in establishing a support infrastructure in Baghdad, and we're building on that base. Both DGIS and NIIA will move into new headquarters buildings before the end of this year.

The recent operations were facilitated by the secure communications backbone for Iraqi intelligence. This network is called the Iraqi Intelligence Network, or I2N, and extends from the national-level intelligence agency to the tactical levels, to include the division headquarters, the provincial offices, providing both secure data and voice communications.

This network is operational, although we're only about 40 percent complete on the install. The architecture will be fully implemented in Iraq by early 2009.

The Iraqi air force is expanding its ability to conduct intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions. The Iraqi air force has five CH-2000 ISR platforms, which -- sensors include hand-held cameras, forward-looking infrared sensors and three Caravan Cessna 208B platforms, with ELIR video balls, two fixed and two portable ground stations.

The Iraqi air force ISR expansion in the next year includes the purchase of five King Air 350s, which will have ELIR video, radar and moving target indicator sensors, with four fixed and five portable ground stations. And just of interest, the first ISR King Air aircraft arrived in Iraq earlier this week.

Many of you know the Iraqis continue to rely primarily on human intelligence, and they have a very significant HUMINT structure.

Signals intelligence is limited, however. The Iraqi MOD and army are developing a SIGINT capability, and this includes low-level voice intercept and direction finding in DGIS and the SIGINT platoons of the Iraqi army Division ISR companies and SIGINT platoons in the Iraqi special operations forces. And we're continuing to expand the capabilities of the Iraqi army divisional intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance companies, to include adding the tactical SIGINT.

We're also looking at adding small throw-and-go unmanned aerial vehicles and some increased analytical capabilities.

The Military Intelligence Academy has trained over 2,700 intelligence professionals since 2006. This year the academy added training courses in basic SIGINT, as well as imagery and mapping and advanced HUMINT. We also do seminars, which we conduct with the Iraqis, to professionalize their intelligence corps.

Just to conclude these introductory remarks, I don't want you to leave with the impression that the Iraqi security force intelligence organizations are ready to assume the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance functions currently being performed by the coalition forces. The coalition continues to provide the vast majority of ISR support for the recent and ongoing operations, border and infrastructure surveillance.

So there's much work remaining to make the Iraqi security forces' intelligence agencies self-reliant. However, we are projecting that all major ISF intelligence organizations will be effective, with minor limiting factors, by the end of 2008.

My team's focus for the near term is working with and supporting operations in targeting at the tactical levels and developing capabilities in the provinces while continuing to mature the organizations we have advise.

The use of the interagency intelligence fusion cell is an extremely important step to focus these relatively large intelligence agencies on the tactical fight. But the process of some procedures are currently in the elementary stages.

There's challenges also that remain in many of the provinces with infrastructure and resources along the border, and the intelligence capability of the navy and air force also needs to be expanded.

The Military Intelligence Academy is key to establishing, improving and sustaining a professionalized intelligence corps, but the academy needs to expand its facility, to add additional instructors and increase the output of graduates from 2,000 a year in 2009 to about 3,000 a year by 2010, 2011.

And finally, I'll just say that trust remains an issue, both internally within the agencies and external among the agencies. Personnel vetting and associated security procedures, while improving, are not yet sufficiently mature.

But in spite of all those challenges, I'll say that the future of ISF - the intelligence organizations, the ISF itself and Iraq is bright.

And with that as an introduction, I'll take your questions.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, very much for the introduction.

A note to the bloggers on the call. We started a little bit late, but we can continue. So don't think that we're going to end in six minutes. So keep on asking the questions if need be.

Jarred Fishman and Ed Morrissey. Let's go ahead and start with Jarred, and then Ed next, okay?

MR. BOND: Okay. Sounds good.

Q Thank you, sir, for -- that was a great brief. I'm Lieutenant Fishman. I'm also an intel guy, so I have a lot of questions, which I'm sure we can get to.

But could you talk a little bit about -- to the human factor? You touched on this with the training at the academy. But what, in your view -- how is the expertise level, not only amongst the junior officers that are coming up or the senior NCOs, but amongst the ministry, the indigenous Iraqis, to be able to understand, conceptualize? Are most of the people that are doing this former Saddam people? Are we bringing in new blood? Just talk a little bit about -- to that human factor.

MR. BOND: Good question. Very much so. This is new blood coming in. While there are some of the former regime members, by and large it's people that in some cases served in the armed forces in the Saddam regime, but very -- a lot of them are brand new to this, which really makes a challenge as far as the training that needs to occur. We conduct seminars. We do the training at the basic level at the Military Intelligence Academy. We provide specialty training as a result of that, tracking off into courses such as SIGINT, imagery and mapping, analysis and so forth. But for the mid-and the senior-level leaders, who in many cases this is also a new field, we do senior-level seminars and try to professionalize them. But a big challenge.

LT. CRAGG: Jarred, do you want to continue with your next question?

Q No, Ed can go. We'll go back and forth.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Ed, go ahead. Q Thank you very much. And Jarred is right; that was a very complete briefing. Thank you very much, sir.

MR. BOND: We're having just a little trouble hearing you.

Q Okay, let me see -- is that a little bit better, sir?

MR. BOND: Yeah, that's better.

Q My question is, what are the challenges of potential infiltration, if you can talk a little bit about that, what your experience has been and how the Iraqis have been able to police that?

MR. BOND: If I heard your question correctly, you're asking about the trust issue.

And it is a big problem.

You know, I'll say that the professionals that we work with, most of them, are very much Iraqi nationalists, which is a good thing. But we are doing a lot of things to help with the vetting program.

For example, everyone that comes into the Iraqi security services goes through a biometric screen, where they do fingerprints, eye scans, photo taken, that sort of thing. And that is all working well.

The next level to that is doing things like the background checks that, I think, some of you are familiar with where, you know, people go out and check to make sure the person that is giving you the information is actually the person you think.

The third level to that is the polygraph. And one of the things that we're working on right now is, we have a polygraph course going on where we have representatives from both DGIS and NIIA receiving training on becoming polygraphers.

And you know, the end result of that is, you've got to be able to trust the individual that you're giving the information to. And it is an issue. We are working it. But it is a challenge.

And without that, you know, we can't freely exchange coalition information to the Iraqis. And you know, the Iraqis themselves are not fully trusting of giving out the information. So I mean, that's a big problem we've got to solve.

(Cross talk.)

Q Obviously the sectarian issues, and we haven't heard a lot of problems coming out of the ISF intel part. But we do know, in the past, there has been al Qaeda infiltration in Mahdi, JAM elements. And with the recent success that we see over there, obviously things must have changed a little bit, because they're being very professional.

But can you talk a little bit about that culture of change, about ensuring a professional force, with non-sectarian influences, only working for the federal authorities?

MR. BOND: Well, you know, as I mentioned before, the thrust and focus of the top-level leadership is, let's get rid of the sectarian issues. And it's trickling down, you know. But it all goes back to that vetting problem. Infiltration, yes. You know, there is infiltration, you know. But I'll tell you that when it is identified, those people are very quickly rooted out. And so, you know, a problem, but it's a problem that we're working and that the Iraqis are working.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. You want to keep on going back and forth, Jarred and then Ed?

Q Sure. I'll take the next one. You mentioned the Iraqi air force, the Iraqi navy. That's something that we don't hear an awful lot about. And I know that you were talking more in terms of intelligence capability, but can you tell us, you know, where those forces are at, just in sort of a general way, because we're mostly hearing about the Iraqi army here in the United States.

MR. BOND: I'm not sure if I got your question. Can you repeat it?

Q Sure. Let me see if I can -- I'll try speaking up here a little bit. I'm sorry about that.

We don't hear a lot about the Iraqi air force and the Iraqi navy in the -- we mostly hear about the Iraqi army. You talked a little bit about the -- about their limited intelligence capabilities. Can you tell us a little bit about what their overall development is at this point in time, and maybe in comparison to the Iraqi army?

MR. BOND: You know, that's a little out of my lane.

Q Sure.

MR. BOND: I'm sure we can get you some information on all of that. But you know, there's -- there are -- you know, what I can tell you -- and we actually have a transition team that's dedicated towards developing the air force -- you know, there's about 3,200 people in the -- authorized in the air force. They're not quite up to that. They've got about 73 aircraft, you know.

And with that, you know, I'll just give you some of that general information. I'm sure we can get you more information from the folks that actually work with the air force, if that helps.

Q Thank you, sir. Q Specifically, when we're targeting the Mahdi Army and the Iranian special groups, clearly there must be some intelligence as we're rolling up their teams. But where do you see most of these leads coming from? Is it just the citizen on the street, or is it that you can infiltrate your officers into the groups, or how exactly are you gaining this actionable intelligence?

MR. BOND: Well, as I mentioned, HUMINT is primarily the coin of the realm here in Iraq, with the Iraqi security forces' fairly well-developed HUMINT.

And it comes from a variety of things.

I mean, there is a tips hotline that people, you know, citizens on the street can call in criminal activities, kind of like, you know, it's not a 911 call but something like that, where the citizens of Iraq can call in and say, you know, there is some activity going on that, you know, needs to be reported.

Let me just say, on HUMINT, very well-developed -- a lot of sources, not very well-developed. And you know, our challenge here is really harnessing that capability and putting some real structure to that, to manage the sources.

And we have a real program going on with that sort of thing to, you know, train the Iraqis on managing their sources. But you know, HUMINT is basically the way we're getting, by far and above, most of the information. And you know, I'll tell you also that the coalition benefits from a lot of that information too.

Q And I'm assuming it's my turn now.

Now, primarily we're seeing the Iraqi security forces going after the Mahdi Army, except for this new operation in Diyala which is, I'm presuming, more targeted towards al Qaeda.

What are the differences in the intelligence operations, between targeting the Mahdis and targeting AQI?

MR. BOND: I really don't want to get into that.

Q Okay.

MR. BOND: You know, I'll just tell you that, you know, we train processes and we train techniques. And those techniques and processes are used against all of those folks.

You know, so I really here don't want to get into some of the specifics on, you know, the specific techniques that are affected against certain groups. Great question though.

(Laughter.)

Q Thanks. LT. CRAGG: Jarred, do you want to continue?

Q Yes, ma'am. How is the interaction with the civilian side with the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of Interior? Obviously, in the past, you know, there have been a lot of problems, both on sectarian or just for one reason or another. What's the professionalism like in the civilian ministries being able to take and make use of the intelligence and provide the monetary and the training support and the logistical support for the intelligence branch?

MR. BOND: I'm not sure if I've got your question there. And you're coming in very, very light here. I think what you're asking is how is the ISF intelligence elements interacting with the population?

Q It was actually more with the -- that's a good question also, but also the civilian ministries -- the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior. How is the governmental support for the intelligence branch coming along?

MR. BOND: Well, you know, as you can probably imagine, coming out of the Saddam era there is great fear and distrust of intelligence, the word "intelligence." You know, one example is the name, NIIA, National Investigation and Information Agency. They didn't want to put the "Intelligence" word in there. But, you know, the way we are working with them, the way we're training with them is rule of law is one of the things that we continue to stress; that everything they do must -- you know, has got to be based on rule of law. So, you know, this is a hard thing coming out of, you know, the Saddam period and then into this, you know, democratic period, being able -- and the intelligence, you know, kind of coming out of that stigma.

So, you know, I'll tell you, it's actually kind of turning a corner here. And, you know, you hear -- things like the tips hotline is one of those things that -- the citizens are, you know, they're tired of what's going on, and you're seeing that they're willing to support the Iraqi security forces, to include the intelligence forces.

LT. CRAGG: Do you have any more follow-on questions?

Q I don't, but I do want to thank Mr. Bond for his time.

LT. CRAGG: Jarred, do you have one more?

Q Let's see.

MR. BOND: I can take one more.

Q Okay, great. You mentioned the training schedule for 2010, 2011, to bring in 3,000 more officers. Is there enough training support? Is the capacity enough for instructors, where there are enough Iraqi instructors, or do they still need to rely on MNSTC-I as instructors? Or how does that situation work?

MR. BOND: Well, I'm glad I took this last question. The Iraqis are almost exclusively doing their own training at this point. The exception to that is the polygraph training I mentioned, the very specialized training.

We're also doing some HUMINT training at the academy that we are doing the initial training. We are training the instructors. And they just finished the U.S. contracted training course. The next course will be taught by the Iraqis with the U.S. oversight. And then there's a third course later on this year which the Iraqis will teach. But the instruction by and large is being taught by the Iraqis.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, I guess that's all the questions, then, for today. Jarred and Ed, thank you so much for participating in today's call.

And Mr. Bond, just so you know, there were a couple other bloggers that were going to be on the call, and I will reach out to them if they have any follow-on questions and pass them as necessary.

MR. BOND: Okay. Well, thank you all very much.

LT. CRAGG: And with that, sir, do you have any closing comments that you'd like to say before we close for today?

MR. BOND: No. I'll just say that I am truly honored to be out here in Iraq working with the Iraqi security forces. You know, patriots -- that the upper-level managers are by far and above the -- they are patriots. I mean, they are, you know, in many cases targeted by some of these criminals and terrorists that are out there, but they are working this, and we're working with this. And we're really seeing a professionalism that is beginning to grow.

And like I said, the future is very bright. I think the thing now is the need to stick to this, to stick to the plan, to make the Iraqis self-reliant on intel. And ultimately, that will help get the U.S. forces and coalition forces out of -- out of Iraq.

So with that, that's all I have.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, gentlemen, for joining today, Mr. Bond and to the bloggers. Today's program will be available at the Bloggers link on DOD.mil, where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call, along with the source documents, such as the audio file and the print transcript.

And again, thank you, Mr. Bond, for joining us, and for the bloggers.

At this time, this concludes today's event. And again, thank you, and have a great day -- or evening.

MR. BOND: It is evening here.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. And thanks for putting up with me with the transfer of the call. I appreciate it.

END.